

***CHINA'S RISE AND THE US ARMY:
LEANING FORWARD***

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INTRODUCTION

The United States led war on terrorism has already had a major impact on developing state relationships in Asia. The coalition of convenience that emerged in the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon has engendered a change in strategic thinking, perceptions, and influence. A significant shift in any of these three areas could have dramatic implications. For the United States, what is required is not only a reassessment of the new realities but also a strategy to take advantage of new opportunities and cope with potential threats. Perhaps nowhere is this need more apparent, or possible responses more fraught with risk, than in determining the impact of such strategic shifts on the US-China relationship, particularly in the security realm.

To date, much of the thinking about the US-China military relationship has focused on averting a Taiwan or South China Sea clash. Prior to the September 11 attacks, these two areas and the Korean peninsula were seen as the most critical flashpoints affecting China. But the war on terror may alter the belief that the threat of US-China military confrontation resides primarily on the Chinese mainland's eastern periphery.

The changing security environment has generated more questions than answers. What impact will America's new relationships with Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have as the war on terror evolves and in the postwar

China's Rise

environment? Will China's burgeoning military and economic relationship with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (composed of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) be placed at risk? Will a potentially long-term US military presence and improved military relations with countries on China's western and southwestern border be perceived by Beijing as calming or as exacerbating separatist sentiment in Xinjiang and Tibet as well as Taiwan? Does the emerging situation provide new opportunities for the United States to engage the Chinese on a number of fronts to include the bilateral military relationship?

As China looks to alternative sources of fossil fuel, minerals, and raw material to feed its economic expansion, will it pursue options that are antithetical to United States interests? Will China emerge from this war a more responsible player committed to greater engagement or more of a threat to US concerns in the region? What type of security relationship will evolve and can the United States take actions now to shape that evolution rather than merely respond to its result?

Recent Chinese assessments of US goals may offer insight into China's current threat perceptions. Some Chinese security specialists see a US strategy emerging that seeks to limit China's rising influence, in part by seeking military bases and new NATO allies in Central Asia, and in part by aiding separatist movements in Tibet, Taiwan and Xinjiang.¹

Other Chinese analysts assert that the battle for resources is more likely to generate a war and that China, which has already committed major investments to oil exploration and drilling in Kazakhstan and to the extraction of mineral, oil and gas resources

from Xinjiang, will assiduously guard against any internal or external forces that may disrupt these efforts.² Investment in its border regions is viewed as essential to meeting China's resource needs and preventing secessionist threats. Combining economic and military initiatives is considered essential to ensuring that gains continue unimpeded. Necessary improvements include expanding transportation and communication capabilities, material stockpiles and quick reaction and control capabilities in the border areas. These actions and sensitivities, coupled with the ever-present possibility that Beijing may miscalculate or misperceive US intentions, could create a situation that leads both parties down the road to hostilities.³

One noted China watcher argues that "China's move to conflict depends on politics, perceptions, and coercive diplomacy involving specific capabilities in specific geographic and political contexts."⁴ If we factor in a possible downward spiraling of China's economy, overwhelming social disorder, and rising nationalist sentiment, then Beijing's ability to maintain social peace may erode. Should the United States be seen as the source of such trouble, increased tensions or even conflict may result.⁵ While much of the focus of potential conflict has been on the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea, the changing international environment emerging from the war on terror may portend significant future challenges for the United States in other areas surrounding China's periphery.

While we cannot predict what environment will emerge and how strategists and policymakers will act or react, the authors of this study believe that it is incumbent upon the US Army to conduct military diplomacy efforts in a manner that will reduce

China's Rise

the potential for miscalculation and misunderstanding. We also believe, however, that America's ground forces must increasingly be prepared, and in new ways, to meet the emergence of a Chinese military threat.

This study will first address US assessments of China including possible conflicts. Next, it will consider Chinese views about meeting the US threat and China's current and emerging capabilities. This will prepare the ground for the main topic of this paper: How should the US Army prepare now to meet China's rise? If China is viewed as a competitive rising power but not a threat, what can be done to improve military relations and to contribute to reducing the chance that it will evolve as a threat? If China emerges at some point as a threat, what should the U.S. Army be doing to ensure that we help deter—and if that fails, to defeat—the Chinese?

We contend that the US Army should take a dual-track approach that seeks to improve relations through increased military exchanges with Chinese counterparts while at the same time training and educating US ground forces to meet any potential threat. We disagree with those who believe that in preparing to meet a possible threat we inadvertently help bring that very threat into being. The US military must be ready for any eventuality in its emerging relationship with China for the sake of our own national security interests and those of others who depend on the United States. Shaping and preparing for China's rise will surely be near the top of our national security priorities for many years to come.

UNITED STATES ASSESSMENT

China watchers in the United States differ in their views about China's rising power. Does Beijing pose a threat or will it become a responsible power focused on continued peaceful relations? One side perceives that "China's military buildup [is] directly aimed at fighting a future war with the United States."⁶ Those who subscribe to this view believe that China's military forces will become the leading threat to the West in this century.⁷ Supporters of this view including many US policy makers, analysts and academics,⁸ believe that China's intent to challenge the United States is rooted in a rising tide of nationalism, its historical humiliations, and its drive to become an international power of consequence.⁹ Some within this group advocate containment to meet this new threat and believe that the United States needs to prepare now for the inevitable. Among the actions they advocate in containing China are reenergizing US alliances and expanding military deployments in Asia.¹⁰

A recent study by the US Defense Department's Office of Net Assessment, which looked at potential threats in Asia, bolsters this view. "China will be a persistent competitor of the United States. . . . A stable and powerful China will be constantly challenging the status quo in East Asia. An unstable and relative[ly] weak China could be dangerous because its leaders might try to bolster their power with foreign military adventurism."¹¹ In this view, China's military buildup and ambitions suggest that Beijing is on a collision course with the United States.¹²

Proponents of this view offer suggestions that range from simply increasing awareness to active and focused program of

China's Rise

countermeasures. A strong US forward presence in Asia is seen as critical, especially in order to reaffirm defense commitments to Japan, Korea, Taiwan and others. Military diplomacy should also play a role but should remain mostly limited to high-level contacts and avoid the transfer of war-fighting skills or technology.¹³

Others vehemently disagree, believing that, “If China is treated as an enemy it will become one.”¹⁴ Those who take this position feel that China’s military capabilities are not a threat and will not become one for a long time. Because heightened tensions and conflict are not foregone conclusions, proponents of this view believe that the United States must fully engage China in a host of different venues.¹⁵ Acknowledging that China’s interests are not necessarily antithetical to ours, the United States must aggressively expand its economic, political and cultural relationship with China building a more positive environment.¹⁶ Advocates of a closer relationship believe a rising China is not aggressive or imperialistic and, as long as no threat appears on its periphery, will continue to focus mainly on resolving internal problems.¹⁷

Some United States and other Western academics and think tank analysts do not believe that China will have the ability to close the military gap and achieve anything even approaching peer competitor status. Because China cannot project power significantly beyond its frontiers, because it does not pose a threat to US interests, and because it is interested in maintaining the status quo, engagement is not only appropriate but imperative if the United States is to shape positive relations with China.¹⁸

CHINESE CONCERNS

Shaping positive relations is critical, since China has already been expressing concerns about increasing United States influence in the region as a result of the war in Afghanistan. Chinese strategic analysts have noted that US deployments have successfully driven a strategic wedge in Central Asia¹⁹ and could “impact on security systems in Western China, and weaken the influence of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.”²⁰

Beijing recognizes that the war in Afghanistan has reduced its relative influence, particularly on its western periphery, and has tried to counter that loss by increasing and reinforcing diplomatic and military efforts in the region. China and its SCO partners have given qualified support for US anti-terror efforts. At the same time, however, the SCO has also called for a neutral Afghanistan and a limit on US expansion of the war on terror. Furthermore, China has pursued senior-level visits to India and continues its arms shipments to Pakistan.²¹ As China tries to find ways to deal with this growing US influence in Central Asia along with greater internal discord, potential security problems in its relationship with the United States loom large.

In other areas, Chinese efforts in the war on terror have been supportive of US initiatives, both in the United Nations and in helping to improve Washington's relationship with Islamabad. Beijing has also supported the war effort by increasing intelligence collection and sharing aimed at Afghanistan, reinforcing troop positions along its western border to keep Al Qaeda and Taliban forces from escaping and contributing to the search for bank accounts related to terrorist groups.²² These contributions however have not led to talks in such contentious

China's Rise

areas as, for example, the proliferation of missile technology or issues related to Taiwan.²³

Much of the current strategic and operational war-fighting discussion in China is focused on thinking “outside the box,” not only about potential opponents but also about how best to apply China’s resources to meeting its national security interests. Some Beijing conservatives believe that China, while naturally expecting conflicts of interest, needs to guard against a loss of its relative power over time. In order to prevent this, China must examine not only how to defend itself against current or emerging traditional threats but also to address “new frontiers of interstate competition.”²⁴ The latter area embraces both military and non military threats.

Current Chinese strategic writings are full of references to developing a strategy that recognizes the country’s relative weaknesses and the need to focus on “approaches in which inferior can defeat superior.”²⁵ These commentaries focus on studying the way the United States has fought before, how it might be expected to fight in the future, and the need to select the best means with which to meet that threat. Chinese strategic thinkers devote much attention to analyzing US conflicts and determining lessons to be learned during the last decade.

The three attacks and the five defenses (*sanda wufang*) have received much attention in recent Chinese military writings. The former recognizes the need to develop a strong capability by improving helicopter, tank, and airborne unit capabilities in an attack. The latter advocates attention to developing the ability to defend against nuclear, biological, chemical, electronic and precision-guided weapon systems. In addition, commentaries are

advocating a push to increase the practice of deploying soldiers on operations and broadening the use of live-fire ammunition in training.²⁶

Chinese war-fighting discussions also highlight the importance of employing strategic reconnaissance and warning; of preventing the introduction of large numbers of enemy troops through anti-access strategies; of destroying command, control and communications nodes; and of disrupting the logistics of deploying US military forces.²⁷ Some in China argue that much more attention needs to be given to countering a high tech enemy, one that makes use not only of traditional war-fighting capabilities but is also now using precision, information and special operations in new ways.²⁸ Such thoughts could only have been reinforced in the minds of those who have watched the American military's performance in the Gulf War, the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, the Balkans, and now in Afghanistan.

Chinese military specialists have coined several terms that illustrate this new way of thinking. "Acupuncture warfare," for example, means interrupting the enemy's information capability by focusing on and "hitting critical joints."²⁹ "Flexible border" means generating earlier warning through improved reconnaissance techniques and more aggressive surveillance.³⁰ "Bee swarm" tactics envisions using waves of unmanned aerial vehicles as a low cost, low tech, high impact tool; "[the effect] could be as ants devouring a person or killer bees attacking a large scale animal that would be terrifying in its result."³¹

Such thinking complements PLA modernization during the last two decades. For the military, these efforts have focused on the acquisition of select weapons and equipment, the development

China's Rise

of Rapid Reaction Forces (RRFs), increased training for specialized units, and a move, albeit slow, towards improving interservice coordination.³²

While most analysts believe that these efforts have benefited only a small portion of the military, improvements to RRFs and implementation of Resolving Emerging Mobile Combat Forces (REMCF) deserve special mention. During the past decade, China has placed increased emphasis on RRF training including an expanded capability to attack mountain regions with combined forces as well as a continued emphasis on the ability to conduct amphibious landings.³³ The development of the RRFs has been linked to ensuring the ability to respond to internal and external threats in Tibet, Xinjiang, the Taiwan Strait, and the South China Sea.³⁴ The REMCF, believed to consist of an infantry division in each of China's seven military regions controlled by authorities in Beijing, is designed to meet a host of potential problems. These include border defense, internal flare-ups, and certain disaster relief requirements, all aimed at reestablishing central government control quickly and effectively.³⁵ How effective the Chinese have been in actual implementation of the REMCF concept continues to be a source of debate.

The degree of effectiveness aside, it is apparent that significant improvements are underway. Ground forces are being streamlined, and increased attention has been paid to improving ground mobility, special operations, and attack helicopter support.³⁶ Giving ground troops the ability to make use of short-range ballistic missiles could significantly enhance the Chinese army's capability. Efforts to develop a responsible non-commissioned officer corps and retain key soldiers demonstrate a

growing commitment towards an increasingly professionalized military. Attention is also being paid to the rudimentary digitizing of command nodes, to greater interoperability between units, and to improving joint operations³⁷ though at a much slower and less advanced level than that of the United States military. As will be discussed later in this paper, the PLA is changing the way it trains to fight as well.

Bureaucratic resistance, interservice rivalries, an entrenched command system, antiquated equipment, and limited resources will in many cases inhibit full implementation these plans. However, programmed improvements will change how China fights in the future. Potential opponents should not assume that China is unprepared to fight because it is still modernizing. The authors of this paper at least, believe otherwise.

Even if one assumes that the United States has a limited chance of engaging China in conflict, the United States may well come into contact with forces being counseled by Chinese advisors, supported by Chinese logisticians, or trained by Chinese tacticians. By studying emerging Chinese war-fighting doctrine and activity, the US Army hedges its bets with other potential foes in the region as well.

Should China have to fight in the near- to mid-term future, it would do so with a military that combines the growing strengths of selected elite units with improved capabilities and those of an older organization raised on earlier war-fighting concepts such as People's War and Local War doctrine. During the next two to three decades, any potential opponent will face a complex amalgam of old and new capabilities, involving traditional and more recent strategies. Some Western analysts dismiss China's

China's Rise

military as ill-prepared, untrained, and unready to meet war-fighting requirements in the 21st century. But limited contact with the Chinese has no doubt affected these (and all other) assessments. It is quite possible, we suggest, that such analysts seriously underestimate the degree to which the Chinese military can and will adapt their patchwork capabilities to meet a threat. The various competencies of these units, combined with unique Chinese cultural, geographic, and domestic imperatives, all indicate the need for serious study not only of its current war-fighting status but also of its likely evolution. We believe the United States military, and in particular the US Army, should conduct an ongoing analysis of the Chinese capabilities and, if possible, exchanges, education, and training.

The lack of recent combat experience by Chinese forces has had an impact on the development of the military. Since China's 1979 Vietnam incursion, much of its own ground force war-fighting assessments have come from studying US actions. Chinese analysts have studied US operations in the Gulf War, Taiwan Strait, Somalia, and Kosovo³⁸ and are sure to study recent actions in Afghanistan. An often quoted, widely available theoretical essay, *Unrestricted Warfare*, argues that Chinese strategic planning needs to take both military and non-military means, such as network hacking, attacking financial institutions, and using the media to counter US strengths.³⁹ There is debate about whether this work by two Chinese colonels reflects broader PLA views and institutional commitment to change,⁴⁰ but it clearly is significant.

It is still unclear whether China will be able to generate the bureaucratic will or resources to implement recommended

changes. Even if it does, how China intends to use these forces would need to be considered.⁴¹ One of the difficulties in determining China's intent is that interactions between Beijing's emerging military leaders and the United States and its allies have been extremely limited.⁴² While much has been written based on discussions with China's think tank experts and on comprehensive studies of internally and externally circulated PLA documents, contact between war fighters at every level on both sides has been negligible. This has fueled mistrust and prevented transparency. Increased military exchanges between both countries' ground forces could begin to reverse these trends.

Even limited contact can have far-reaching impacts. A US military attaché in Beijing noted recently that a fellow US military officer discounted the likelihood the Chinese would take a particular operational stance with its modernized equipment "because that is not what we would do."⁴³ Cultural misunderstandings between the United States and China can have significant consequences. As Richard Betts and Thomas Christensen have noted, "China does not need to match American standards to reshape the strategic environment."⁴⁴ This holds equally true at the operational and tactical levels.

Whether China is seen as having a weak or burgeoning military capability, as a benign or growing military threat, as a state with converging or conflicting interests, what is clear is that the US Army must do all it can both to meet a potential challenge and to reduce misunderstanding between the two countries. We believe it is incumbent on the US Army to pursue a two track approach: seek military-to-military opportunities that would build respect, trust, and reciprocity and prepare to meet a future Chinese

China's Rise

threat. Exposure by US Army soldiers and units to the Chinese military in a reciprocal arrangement would allow greater opportunities to pursue common interests as well as enable us to understand a potential threat.

MILITARY EXCHANGES

Military exchanges and increased China-oriented training and education in US Army schools will open up a host of opportunities. Army Colonel Neal Anderson has offered some reasons for pursuing such contacts.⁴⁵ First, contacts that lead to improved relationships will help shape China's rise as a responsible power. The Chinese military will play a major role in the emerging global security environment. Discussions and exchanges between the US Army and the PLA can expose both organizations to each other's perspectives. Mutual ignorance is in no one's interest.⁴⁶

United States allies in the region stand to benefit as well. Increased contacts with the PLA, when accomplished in coordination with allies in the region, can help reduce mistrust and miscalculation and, may even play a role in alleviating outbreaks of tension over volatile issues. Of course, the United States, allies and friends, especially in Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Thailand, must not only be informed of such contacts but also actively consulted, since the outcome may have large implications for their future security.⁴⁷ And military exchange efforts should complement ongoing political, economic, and social bilateral and multilateral initiatives as well.

As we've noted, bilateral military exchanges can enhance transparency and mutual understanding and reduce distrust and miscalculation.⁴⁸ Such exchanges also help both sides gain a

better appreciation of the potential risks and costs of heightened tensions or an outbreak of hostilities. Likewise, such a relationship, some have argued may help “disabuse Chinese elites of any belief that they might have of the unwillingness” of the United States to fight.⁴⁹

One of the major difficulties with previous US military exchanges has been in defining what reciprocity means to both sides. On the U.S. side this has raised concerns that the Chinese have much more to gain from such contacts than Washington. The term “rough reciprocity,” sort of fudged this objection by giving the Chinese credit for showing movement and opening some doors to their military without providing true reciprocal visits. Detailed briefings and tours set up to support visits by Chinese military leaders to US Army Training and Doctrine sites as well as to infantry and armor units were reciprocated in China by scripted and limited orientations for US Army and joint delegations. In terms of showing United States strength there is much to be gained by such a program, but it does little to gain the United States insight into China’s own military environment.

The idea that almost any exchange was a positive one seriously undermined the credibility of the program, especially as the Chinese began to request yet more detailed visits to view Army operations and training in places such as Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and the National Training Center in California, and even made requests directly to the posts they hoped to visit. All of this without the US Army getting truly reciprocal exchanges in China.

The suspension of military engagement programs by the Bush administration in early 2001 and the introduction of a case-by-case review of each exchange was due in part to Secretary of Defense

China's Rise

Donald Rumsfeld's position that "the overriding objective in [the United States] military exchange program [needed] to ensure that these exchanges benefit the United States [and that] is the principle by which future such exchanges must be evaluated."⁵⁰

This was clearly a rebuke of the previous administration's engagement program. Indeed, any future program of military exchanges with the Chinese will doubtless have to meet much more specific objectives. Those participating will have to be better versed on those objectives and actually use such contacts to attain them. This will require officers in each service sensitive to such requirements and a mechanism for conveying those means and ends to participants of future exchanges.

For the US Army, what is crucial to any future military exchange program will be protecting war-fighter capabilities while ensuring that such contacts do not build up Beijing's own combat and power projection potential. While building transparency and reciprocity, future exchanges must also ensure that critical information remains secure. This will require coordinated and focused preparatory briefings for all participants in such a program, as well as after-action assessments funneled back into Department of the Army G-3. As the focal point, the Army G-3 could operate as a clearinghouse for future endeavors, especially useful to those lacking regular contact with the Chinese. G-3 would also be responsible for ensuring that exchanges carry out stated objectives in support of the Chief of Staff, Army, Commander-in-Chief, US Pacific Command, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Secretary of Defense. This will make it possible to judge the success of such exchanges and to arrange

future engagement opportunities and cost-benefit analytical efforts.

One of the most difficult issues continues to be Chinese resistance to more open discussions with military leaders at different levels as well as visits to sites in China that might allow greater transparency. China's 1998 Defense White Paper emphasized the importance of military diplomacy as a way to engender greater mutual respect and benefits, especially with the United States.⁵¹ But, especially among the senior Chinese military leadership, there remains tremendous resistance within the PLA to allowing US military personnel to view specific Chinese defense locations, personnel and equipment. This is due in part to the embarrassment of the Chinese leadership over the backwardness of its military force, and in part to the secretive nature of the military in general.⁵²

However, it is perhaps also a deep suspicion of US motives and intent along a number of fronts, especially among these senior military officers and defense officials, which limits greater cooperation and significant improvement on issues related to transparency.⁵³ In recent years the conflict in Kosovo, the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade,⁵⁴ the EP-3 incident in the South China Sea off of Hainan Island, as well as a host of political and military actions by the United States which are viewed as antithetical to Chinese interests, have only served to exacerbate such views.⁵⁵

Fortunately, there are indications that within the Chinese defense establishment, a generational divide may exist over Sino-American military exchanges. Rising mid-grade officers are often more open to expanding discussions with the US military. In

China's Rise

general, these officers have benefited from greater education and training opportunities and have spent more time outside the mainland.⁵⁶ These same individuals often have a much broader understanding of and a more critical perspective on foreign militaries. Future US Army military exchanges should seek to broaden contacts with these rising leaders. Increased attention should also be paid to expanding upon the success of contacts between US Army Foreign Area Officers (China) and their Chinese counterparts, which would promote contacts with those who are most likely to rise to the top of their respective countries' military profession. Expanding such contacts could contribute significantly to the development of more positive security relations between China and the United States in the future as well.

On the United States side, there also exist many challenges. During the mid-1990s, military contacts with China received a push from then Secretary of Defense, William Perry, with reciprocal support from his counterpart, Chi Haotian.⁵⁷ The established engagement structure promoted high- and mid-level exchanges as well as confidence-building measures. In 2000 alone there were thirty-four exchanges between Chinese and US defense representatives.⁵⁸ On the United States side, the majority of these exchanges involved senior Defense Department and Joint Staff leaders, Pacific Command representatives, National Defense University students, Navy and Maritime representatives. There were also functional exchanges in such areas as medicine and logistics. US Army personnel participated in each of these, and the United States Military Academy Superintendent visited China.⁵⁹

As noted, Secretary Rumsfeld is conducting a review of military exchanges with China, approving them on a case-by-case basis and only after determining that the proposed contact will benefit the United States.⁶⁰ The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) is reviewing United States defense objectives vis-à-vis China in order to improve the exchange program.⁶¹ While OSD recognizes that military exchanges create useful channels of discussion there is also a sense that the way ahead must include greater reciprocity.⁶²

United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) continues to rely on its Theater Engagement Plan (TEP) to guide its military engagement program with China. Chief among the TEP's objectives are increased access, influence, and goodwill as well as improved bilateral relationships.⁶³ However, measuring the degree of improvement by executing the TEP is difficult. Additionally, a senior officer at USPACOM notes that when it comes to China, US deterrence and defense activities in the region must hedge against potential threats but at the same time be careful to not take actions which could cause a threat to develop.⁶⁴ An officer working China issues in OSD, echoes this sentiment stating that care must be taken not to overstate the China threat making it a self-fulfilling prophecy. There is a need for vigilance but the threat should not be exaggerated.⁶⁵ Additionally, there is a sense at USPACOM that the way ahead in military exchanges is to focus more effectively on mid-grade officers, since they are perceived to be more supportive of military-to-military contacts.⁶⁶

United States Army efforts to engage the PLA in recent years have focused on military law, history, training, and professional development exchanges.⁶⁷ But limited reciprocal access by US

China's Rise

Army representatives has lessened support for future exchanges and hampered the ability of both countries to move towards greater transparency and measures which build confidence.

MILITARY EXCHANGES: THE WAY AHEAD

So what should be the way ahead? Subject to OSD guidance and in concert with joint engagement plans, the US Army should design an aggressive program of exchanges which meets definite objectives designed to enhance understanding while protecting key US war-fighter components. In addition, each approved mission should not only complement ongoing exchanges by its sister services and the joint community but should also ensure that it is linked to allied concerns in the region. Specifically, the US Army should:

- Design a program that defines areas of interest for each military exchange and relay it in the form of guidance and topical points to US Army representatives meeting with Chinese. The goal here is to improve understanding of Chinese issues and to highlight continuing areas of interest in a way that builds transparency and respect for both sides. Standards should be devised that will allow a realistic assessment of each exchange and a comprehensive analysis as the overall program moves forward.
- Encourage greater numbers of informed and prepared mid-grade level (Major to Brigadier General) Army exchanges designed to promote relationships with Chinese counterparts. These contacts should be made up of operations (combat arms and combat support) and operations support (Foreign Area Officer) delegations. Such a mix would not only enhance understanding during these bilateral visits but also improve intraservice knowledge of China-related and current US Army issues as well.
- Broaden military academic exchanges between the US Military Academy, Reserve Officer Training Corps, Command and General Staff College, and US Army War

College and the equivalent schools in China. Again, these exchanges should have specific objectives and should integrate students with regional experts to ensure maximum benefit not only to the Army but the defense community as a whole.

- Increase humanitarian assistance/disaster relief contacts using US Army personnel and equipment. Shared experiences in this arena could have tremendous benefits for both countries, not only by improving capabilities to respond to these activities but also by offering a relatively benign way to pursue reciprocal visits and enhance transparency. These contacts could lead eventually to joint and combined humanitarian assistance/disaster relief operations.
- Broaden US Army participation in ongoing anti-terrorist efforts. While necessarily behind the scenes, there are natural links available with the war on terror that should be exploited to further meet national goals. In concert with those efforts ongoing with other countries in the region, expanding ties in this area could provide much insight into Chinese concerns and capabilities regarding internal and external terrorist threats.
- Encourage United States and Chinese Army participation in multilateral non-war-fighting and logistics related venues. Examples include the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies courses and the Pacific Armies Management Seminar, which could make possible mutually beneficial discussions in a non-threatening environment. These contacts, while not necessarily combat-oriented, should involve both US Army operations and operations support representatives with assigned tasks and cultural preparation.
- Build on the success of the current Foreign Area Officer (China, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia) program by ensuring that each officer involved fully understands China-related OSD, Joint Staff, Army Staff, and USPACOM objectives and can convey them to their US Army counterparts in order to integrate them into future military exchanges. These FAOs should also be provided opportunities to “re-green” or return to war-fighter-oriented positions at the Division, Corps, or Joint Task

China's Rise

Force levels so that they can remain current on the complex changes taking place in the US Army. This is critical to building better support for future operations and ensuring that FAOs remain sensitive to war fighter requirements.

- Link US Army exchanges with China to ongoing initiatives with allies and friends in the region in order to mitigate any concerns they may have and promote further cooperation. This will require a coordinated system of information transfer among FAOs and other regional experts in Japan, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, and Taiwan, which could then be further transferred to host nations.
- Invest resources in military exchanges to improve understanding and reciprocity. Budgetary oversight and support by the Department of the Army tied to specific objectives and desired outcomes would allow subordinate commanders to expand initiatives for exposure to the Chinese and, should tensions arise, create a greater base of understanding throughout the Army about a potential adversary.

Keys to the success of this military exchange program include not only resources but also a clear focus on the end state – one that does not compromise US Army war-fighting capability or contribute to China's own combat readiness or deployment capability. Central coordination by the Army G-3 and consultation with war fighters in US Army Pacific, US Army, Japan, and US Forces, Korea and other Army and joint commands in the region is essential. So is incorporating the advice and analysis of the United States Defense Attaché Office, Beijing, into any proposed Army effort. Equally important are ties to Army G-2 (Intelligence) and G-4 (Logistics), Joint Staff (J-5 Policy), and OSD (China Desk) to ensure awareness and integration of ongoing programs and concerns that can affect any initiatives.

A strong program of military exchanges tied to set objectives and a reciprocal framework would improve understanding, help reduce tensions, and increase transparency. Such an initiative must be matched by a willingness on the part of the Chinese to meet the United States effort. The desire to improve relations must necessarily incorporate a military diplomatic effort of which an exchange program would be a central part. However, it is understood that, at any time, the relationship could turn increasingly negative. Should it do so, such an exchange effort must be matched by a complementary effort to prepare US Army units for a more lethal scenario. The next part of this essay addresses how we can best train and educate our forces to meet such a challenge.

HEDGING OUR BETS

The benefits of a more robust Army mil-to-mil program with the PLA are clear. The transparencies and confidence building measures resulting from the previous suggestions would reduce the opportunity for miscalculations on both sides when future crises occur—as they will. The Belgrade bombing and EP3-Orion downing are examples of incidents that will naturally occur as two major powers assert themselves in Greater Asia. Also, the Taiwan issue is always volatile and will not go away anytime soon.

The likelihood of future crises underscores the need for better mil-to-mil relationships to reduce the opportunity for conflict. It also underscores the need for the United States Army to better understand how the PLA fights and if necessary, how to fight the PLA. While it is unlikely that the United States and China will engage in ground combat in the near future, it would be best to take some measures to prepare for such an eventuality.

China's Rise

Unfortunately, research conducted for this paper indicates that the PLA spends much more time and energy learning how to fight us than vice versa.

Since the Gulf War the PLA has changed the way it trains to fight. For China, the Gulf War was a wake-up call. Prior to Desert Storm, the PLA high command predicted that US forces would become bogged down in the Gulf, as the Soviets did in Afghanistan. They were very surprised. The Chinese leadership's reaction to the US victory was deep and lasting.⁶⁸ They were impressed with the precision of US attacks and the lack of collateral damage. They were "stunned," and "every element of the allied strategy left the PLA aghast and hammered home as never before the backwardness of the PLA."⁶⁹ The Gulf War forced the PLA to study the ways and means of implementing rapid reaction force concepts, theories, and operations that could conceivably impede US capabilities. Chinese strategists continue to study the transformation of the US military in the wake of the campaign against Iraq and other more recent military endeavors.⁷⁰

Certainly, the PLA has become more serious and realistic about training. Currently, PLA ground force units train at three levels: individual, small unit, and combined arms regiments and divisions.⁷¹ As noted earlier, RRUs have priority in training.⁷² Since 1990, the PLA has increased the number of their large-scale joint and combined arms exercises, which incorporate night operations, opposition force scenarios (discussed in detail later), and live fire exercises.⁷³

Since 1995 the PLA has increased the complexity of its exercises by adding long-range and intra-regional rapid deployments into exercise scenarios. For example, rapid reaction

forces (RRF) units in different military regions (MRs) have conducted long-range and mobile combined exercises in challenging topographical locations such as the Gobi Desert, the Tibetan and Xinjiang highlands, and China's southwestern tropical forests.⁷⁴

More important, there has been some effort to increase the realism of field training, mainly through opposed-force exercise formats where a Blue (enemy) Force contingent offers resistance as the Red Force drives to its objective. In fact, some in the Chinese press report that Chinese troops are being trained for war with the United States, using methods freely handed over to them by the US Army. According to *Beijing Junshi Wenzha*, an official Chinese military publication, People's Liberation Army (PLA) visitors to US Army exercises went home "loaded with valuable information about how the U.S. would engage the PLA in the event of war."⁷⁵ The digest reported that Chinese military officials visited the U.S. Owensburg National Training Center ("Owensburg" may be Ft. Irwin) several years ago and observed "the sharp exchanges between US troops and a simulated opposition "Blue Force."

After the Chinese group of representatives returned home to China, they made a special report to the Central Military Commission," the digest added. "In March of the next year, based on authorization from the CMC, the Nanjing Military Region [in southern China, responsible for the Taiwan Strait] formally organized a combined tactics training center. At this point, China then had its first 'Blue Army' base."⁷⁶

At a supposedly secret base in China's eastern Anhui province, "training is held strictly in accordance with the commands and orders used in foreign armies and their training formats, with even the mess hall using knives and forks [similar to

China's Rise

those in the United States].”⁷⁷ The digest reports: “In today’s Chinese Army, there is a ‘Blue Army’ base specializing in simulating the war tactics of foreign militaries in order to compel our army in counter operations to ‘Know the Enemy’ and therefore ‘defeat the enemy.’” The publication leaves no doubt that the “enemy” is the United States, which generously taught China how to train its troops to fight us in a future war.⁷⁸

Many might speculate that this report is bogus. After all, it has been mainly referenced in the right-of center media and there is no Owensburg National Training Center. Still, other reports in the Chinese press lend it some credibility. Between July 1997 and January 2001, Chinese sources reported the establishment of combined arms tactical training centers and special aggressor units, designed to improve operational efficiency of the PLA in a combat environment. The 1997 *Chinese Military Encyclopedia* (Zhongguo Junshi Baike Quanshu) refers to “components of combined arms tactical training centers consisting of a command system, a ‘blue’ or aggressor unit (moni budui), an opposition force (OPFOR) training site, a computer simulation room, a control center, and logistic service facilities.”⁷⁹ The secret Anhui training center is referred to in a May 2000 article in the *World Military Affairs Journal* (Shijie Junshi) as the first combined arms tactical training center in China. The center is capable of supporting realistic combined arms tactical training and uses a secret OPFOR aggressor unit with some interesting characteristics. Troops assigned to this unit wear green berets, camouflage uniforms, and special badges. In communications with armored cars, tanks and armed helicopters, animal names are used instead of the local call signs which the PLA normally uses.

During OPFOR exercises, weapons are fitted with laser-beam attachments for a realistic battlefield effect.⁸⁰

All seven of China's military regions (MRs) have combined arms training centers that use OPFOR units. Based on several reports however, it appears that the more robust OPFOR capabilities are at the Anhui Training Center, which is in the Nanjing Military Region, and the Beijing Military Region's training center.⁸¹ Under the old system, the PLA always managed to "trounce the aggressor unit," but in 1997 that changed "to ensure a fair evaluation of tactical actions and to enhance the exercise effect."⁸² OPFOR units in the Beijing and Nanjing MRs speak foreign languages, wear special uniforms and use tactics, equipment, organization and training which are exactly like those of a hypothetical enemy.⁸³ Many, including the authors of this paper, believe that the "hypothetical enemy" is the United States.

Fortunately, while the PLA's "blue force" OPFOR is probably based on a United States model, it does not have—at least in the near term—US capabilities. Indeed, as with most articles concerning PLA in the Chinese press, one has to discern how much is wishful thinking and how much is reality. Dennis Blasko, perhaps the best-informed PLA watcher, speculates that "theoretically, the Chinese will seek to emulate U.S. or Western tactics, but the reality would be much harder to accomplish since the PLA has so little of the gear necessary to carry out U.S. tactical battle (Airland Battle) operations."⁸⁴ For example, "the entire PLA ground forces of some 2 million has a total of 250 or so helicopters of all types including transport, reconnaissance, attack, and medevac."⁸⁵ Compare this with the American 101st Airborne (Air Mobile) Division which has about the same number

China's Rise

of helicopters with greater capabilities in just one division.⁸⁶ The PLA's lack of helicopters, modern tanks, armored personnel carriers, and night fighting capabilities, would make it difficult to replicate what US forces can do on the battlefield. According to Blasko, "the PLA may be able to simulate U.S. forces, but they really could not be used to the same degree our forces could."⁸⁷ True, the PLA has a great way to go to achieve more realism in combined operations training, but they seem to be following the US model.

The U.S. Army's approach to this problem was to create several training centers where units face a highly-trained opposing force (OPFOR) in a free-play exercise environment. Laser simulators, video and audio recording, impartial umpires, and elaborate instrumentation create a realistic combat environment and provide extensive feedback to the exercising unit. Central to the National Training Center experiences is the freedom to fail, in fact the freedom to be thoroughly trounced by the OPFOR if the commander, staff, and unit are not well prepared. . . . The training centers, simulators, and training programs took the U.S. Army over a decade to develop and implement. It will take the PLA at least as long, and that only after they embrace the concept of realism in training and the freedom to fail that entails.⁸⁸

Notwithstanding their current limitations, the trend in the PLA's training center philosophy seems to follow the United States example. There has been an effort to increase field training realism, through OPFOR exercise formats using enemy (Blue Force) contingents that counter PLA (Red Force) operations. Red Forces do not always win as they did in the past, which might indicate there is freedom to fail. Also, as mentioned previously, Chinese sources indicate the PLA are incorporating "miles-type"

equipment, computer assisted simulations, and video assisted after-action reviews (AARs).

Because the PLA has followed the United States example in setting up its training centers and fights against a Blue Force OPFOR with what seem to be “American characteristics,” one might assume that the US Army would in at least some scenarios, employ an OPFOR (referred to as the Red Force) that fights with Chinese Characteristics. Not true. The Red Force OPFOR at all US Army Combat Training Centers—the National Training Center at Ft. Irwin, California, Joint Readiness Training Center at Ft. Polk, Louisiana, and the Combat Maneuver Training Center at Hohenfels, Germany—are called Krasnovians and use modified Soviet tactics and equipment. The mission of the training centers is to provide tough, realistic combined arms and combat service support training for light and heavy battalion task forces in low-to-mid-to-high intensity threat environments and to provide units with quality, standardized feedback on their performance. An integral part of accomplishing this mission is the OPFOR. The OPFOR replicates a motorized rifle regiment (MRR) and smaller operational units based on the forces of the former Soviet model, employing their organizations, doctrine, and tactics, as well as equipment that has been modified for today’s battlefield environment.⁸⁹

Interestingly, there is very little taught about the People’s Liberation Army in US Army schools. The Infantry School at Ft. Benning, Georgia does not teach anything about the People’s Liberation Army doctrine, operations, or tactics in either the Basic or Advanced Courses,⁹⁰ nor do any of the Army branch qualification schools.⁹¹ The Army’s Command and General Staff

China's Rise

College at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas has a China survey course that deals with security issues, but not at all with how the PLA fights.

The lack of PLA studies in the US Army training and education establishment is unfortunate. We believe that the US Army needs to devote more resources to understanding how the Chinese military approaches strategic issues and how they fight. The Chinese way of analyzing security problems and conducting warfare is often radically different from the West's. In our opinion, a greater understanding of the thinking and outlook of China's military planners, doctrine writers, and commanders is necessary if the United States and China are to avoid dangerous miscalculation in the future.⁹²

TRAINING TO FIGHT: THE WAY AHEAD

If understanding how the PLA fights is important, how should the US Army go about it? These are our suggestions:

- Insist that all military academies, mid-level and senior service schools teach the Naval Post-Graduate School's "Seminar on the Chinese People's Liberation Army" or the Army's Command and General Staff College's course titled "China: Military Art, Wars and Revolutions, and the People's Liberation Army." Shorter variants of either course should be taught at selected Branch School career courses.
- Organize, train, and equip a PLA OPFOR unit. Consider using the US Army National Guard for this unit and employing the unit in an Mobile Training Team configuration at Combat Training Centers (CTCs), BCTP Warfighter exercises, and TRADOC branch schools. Develop a core group of China strategic and operational experts to devise realistic OPFOR plans and to advise US Army units on ways to operate against such a potential threat.

- Consider using the 141st Military Intelligence Battalion (Linguist) from the Utah National Guard as a major resource from which to build a credible PLA OPFOR unit.

CONCLUSION

As noted at the outset of this paper, the emerging security environment in Asia poses significant challenges and opportunities for the United States. China's strategic and operational perspective and plans are continuously being modified in reaction to domestic and international influences. It is critical that the United States do likewise to ensure that we not only help shape the future but remain ready to act and react should an environment develop counter to United States interests. The US Army, as always, plays a key role in that effort.

Anticipating change is always difficult. What is beyond question is that China's strategic and operational intent will continue to develop and the United States cannot be sure of what impact that development will have on US interests and goals in the region. It remains important for the United States to continuously review emerging capabilities and intentions of potential friends or foes to anticipate how best to retain the initiative, apply resources and address various alternatives. Likewise, we believe that it is important that any such a review provide specific proposals as to the way ahead so that we can best be postured to deter and defend in the future. It is hoped that this paper has contributed to that effort.

Increased military exchanges with greater education and training best positions the US Army to deal with any eventuality in dealing with China. The skills needed to do both require a detailed and continuous planning, coordination and execution.

China's Rise

The potential benefits for the US Army, the joint community and the nation can prove great if exchanges and training are done in a way that builds understanding by increasing communication yet hedges our bets but ensuring that we are trained to fight against this unique adversary should the occasion arise. China's rise will continue. Leaning forward in the foxhole ensures that America's ground forces will be ready for every eventuality.

NOTES

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